DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 242 468 RC 014 689

AUTHOR	Leon, David Jess
TITLE	The Dream of South Mountain.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	Apr 80
NOTE	9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Pacific Sociological Association (San Francisco, CA, April 1980).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement; American Indians; Anglo Americans; Blacks; College Curriculum; College Programs; *College Role; *Community Colleges; Community Services; Educational Objectives; *Educational Philosophy; *Ethnic Groups; *Institutional Characteristics; *Low Income Groups; Mexican Americans; School Community Relationship; Two Year Colleges; Urban Universities
IDENTIFIERS	*South Mountain Community College AZ

ABSTRACT

It is hoped that the development of South Mountain Community College will have significant impact on the South Phoenix community (Arizona) which has an urban and minority population characterized by lower educational level, lower income, and higher unemployment than populations in other portions of the county. The community college is expected to draw at least 4,000 full- and part-time students, 70% of whom will probably come from low-income families and 60% from ethnic minority groups. Ethnic/racial composition of the college is estimated as 36% Mexican American, 24% Black, 2% Native American, 37% Anglo American, and 1% other. Six major areas of educational programs and services will be transfer/general education programs, occupational programs, developmental educational programs, continuing education, cultural/community services, and counseling/student support services. The college philosophy embraces the concepts of lifelong learning, uniqueness of individuals, guidance of the community in determining the college mission, offering of educational services, and development of supportive and community services. Ten goals have been outlined, including serving the multicultural community with varied socioeconomic levels in a rural/urban environment by providing programs and services which meet individual needs. (MH)

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THE DREAM OF SOUTH MOUNTAIN

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MAR 1984
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David Jess Leon, Ph.D.
Program Coordinator/Scholar-in-Residence
MALDEF

Assistant Professor
Graduate School of Education
U.C. Berkeley

RC 014689

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Pacific Sociological Association, San Francisco, April, 1980. I would gratefully like to acknowledge aid from the National Institute of Education (NIE) Minorities and Women's Program, whose funds made this study possible. The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the policy, position, or endorsement of NIE and MALDEF.

THE DREAM OF SOUTH MOUNTAIN

Introduction

The plight of minority groups in the United States has long aroused concern and sympathy among public-minded citizens and government officials. They have posed such questions as: How are we going to solve their pressing needs? What are we going to do about their children? Are they doomed to a life of poverty like their parents? Social scientists have traditionally responded to these questions with elaborate theories which ultimately "blame the victim": minorities suffer from either inferior genes, a damaging culture or both (cf. Ramirez & Castaneda, 1974; Ryan, 1978; Valentine, 1969).

Many liberal investigators, however, view minorities as trapped in one large vicious circle: society has shunted them into unskilled and semi-skilled occupations which pay low wages and are often erratic; lack of money narrows the opportunities for good housing, medical care, food, clothing, and education; lack of education restricts choice of jobs and life chances. These social scientists feel that through education, minorities and poor whites could avoid the inevitability of menial labor, and thus break the circle. For these reasons, the desegregation of America's schools at all levels proved to be a great victory for liberal theoreticians.

Recently, however, radical social scientists have criticized the vicious circle theory as narrow-minded and simplistic. They argue that educational reform programs cannot have a significant effect on existing societal injustices, because they have economic roots and serve economic purposes (cf. Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Carnoy & Levin,

1976, Olivas, 1979). They contend that reform is merely cosmetic and ultimately futile.

In light of this controversy, this exploratory study will describe and analyze the development of a community college - South Mountain Community College in Phoenix, Arizona - which has had a significant impact on a local community college district and the surrounding area.

The Setting

The ground breaking ceremony for the establishment of South Mountain Community College in August, 1979, was hailed by supporters as part of the revitalization of the long-neglected South Phoenix community, and as the first step in improving the quality of life for many of the community residents. The construction of the $8.4 million dollar complex represents a commitment to the educational needs of the community members and a victory to the supporters of South Mountain in their efforts for greater community control of public supported services.

The South Phoenix community is comprised of a geographic region of approximately 48 square miles, with an urban and minority population characterized by a lower educational level, a lower income level, and a higher unemployment level than the populations in other portions of the county. In addition, the area lacks any town center such as a shopping center or business district, or any recreational facilities such as a park, all of which provide a sense of community. To this end, the establishment of the community college was seen as vital to the growth and development of the area.

South Mountain will thus become the seventh college in the Maricopa

County Community College District. This district is the largest in the state, and one of the largest in the nation. The district enrolls over 50 percent of the community college students in the state. A student from South Phoenix desiring postsecondary education must attend a nearby community college or Arizona State University. The nearest postsecondary institution, Maricopa Technical Community College, provides technical courses as well as general education courses but does not offer a two-year transfer program. About 1,000 students enroll at this institution from the South Mountain area. Another 7,000 students enroll in the remaining five community colleges in the surrounding area.

It is estimated that the 1980 population for the South Mountain service area will be approximately 113,000. The community college is expected to draw at least 4,000 full and part-time students. It is estimated that 70% of the students will come from low income families and 60% will come from ethnic minority groups. The ethnic/racial composition of the college is estimated as: Mexican American (36%); Black (24%); Native American (2%); Anglo (37%) Other (1%).

Educational Programs and Services

The educational programs and services provided by South Mountain Community College are divided into six areas:

1. Transfer/General Education Programs - This set of courses is designed to offer the first two years of parallel or preprofessional courses so that students enrolled may complete their studies at the four year college or university.

2. Occupational Programs - This set of courses is designed to

prepare students for business and industry by providing technical, vocational, and paraprofessional training. Completion of this program will lead to an Associate Degree or certificate which will qualify students for skilled positions in the labor market.

3. Developmental Educational Programs - This program is designed for students with limited success in academic settings or who have been away from educational institutions for an extended amount of time. Developmental education is defined as 1) an effort to take the student from where he is to where he wants to go; and 2) to provide him with the needed academic skills in a protective environment to make that movement possible (cf. Roueche & Roueche, 1977).

4. Continuing Education - This set of courses will provide educational training for younger and older adults who wish to improve their professional training and to expand their fields of knowledge. The courses will be offered at both on and off campus locales.

5. Cultural/Community Services - This program is designed to offer services to the community by offering plays, exhibits, and workshops on critical issues. Campus facilities will be made available to community groups with the intent of enriching both the college and its community.

6. Counseling/Student Support Services - These services consist of personal assessment and development, career and job development, and individualized or family/group counseling, which will provide students with personal and academic enrichment.

Philosophy of South Mountain

The philosophy of South Mountain Community College embraces the concepts of life-long learning, the uniqueness of the individual, the guidance of

the community in determining the college mission, the offering of educational services, and the development of supportive and community services. The President has outlined the following goals:

1. To serve the multi-cultural community with varied socio-economic levels in a rural/urban environment by providing programs and services which meet individual needs. In addition, the college will promote an awareness sensitivity and appreciation of the community.
2. To maintain an "open door" philosophy in admissions policies.
3. To offer a comprehensive curriculum (as previously mentioned).
4. To promote ideals that are conducive to both internal and external communication.
5. To maintain a staff who is student-oriented and sensitive to the needs of the community and to the goals of the college.
6. To provide student success which includes personal and career counseling and financial assistance.
7. To provide development programs for students who have had limited academic success or who have been away from formal education for an extended length of time.
8. To provide alternative instructional approaches for meeting indivdual needs.
9. To provide day and evening classes with flexible enrollment periods.
10. To serve as a community center for meetings, gatherings, and cultural presentations.

Future Plans

The problem now confronting the leaders of South Mountain is one of implementation. What kind of programs in community colleges best

serve the educational needs of minorities and adults? Are there models that can be followed? If so, what theories are currently accepted and do these theories provide workable answers to the needs of the clientele to be served? These are some of the issues which confront those involved in the development of this community college.

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